

CHAPTER 4

Formal Dining

Formal entertaining is no longer commonplace on the American scene, partly because of the trend toward informality in living and partly because of the requirement for a well-trained staff and expensive table appointments. For the average Navy family, informal dinners are far more usual. Flag officers and service representatives abroad are often involved, however, in hosting seated dinners. When such official occasions warrant the traditional formality of the past, details of absolutely correct service, table settings, and menus are available in general etiquette books. A few basic guidelines are summarized here for those who find themselves entertaining formally.

GENERAL GUIDELINES

Formal entertaining is usually intended to honor a special guest as well as to extend hospitality. Guests are seated according to rank as illustrated in Chapter 3.

Formal dinners generally commence at 8 p.m. or 8:30 p.m. The attire should be specified on the invitation. Generally, this is black tie and occasionally white tie. For black tie, ladies generally wear ankle length dinner dresses of wool, velvet, cotton or silk; for white tie occasions, they wear floor length evening gowns of dressier material and design. Current fashion may sometimes dictate that dinner and evening dresses may be short.

The President rarely dines out except at official banquets, or with members of his Cabinet. Then he and his wife are met at the front door by the host and hostess and escorted to the drawing room. Other guests arrive approximately 15 minutes earlier, so they may be assembled when the President arrives. The host and hostess may relinquish their places at the table to the President and his wife, and move one seat to the left of their normal positions, or the President may choose to sit in the usual guest of honor seat and have his wife placed on the host's right. When an invitation to dinner is to be extended to the President, a proposed guest list, seating plan, and details on other arrangements should be submitted to the White House for approval before any invitations are tendered.

Occasionally, a U.S. Navy host may be required to entertain royalty, a head of state, or the members of a ruling family, either on board ship or ashore. One must carefully comply with the guidelines which are set forth above concerning presidential guests and with protocol expectations that are conveyed by the Department of State and the representatives of such prospective visitors.

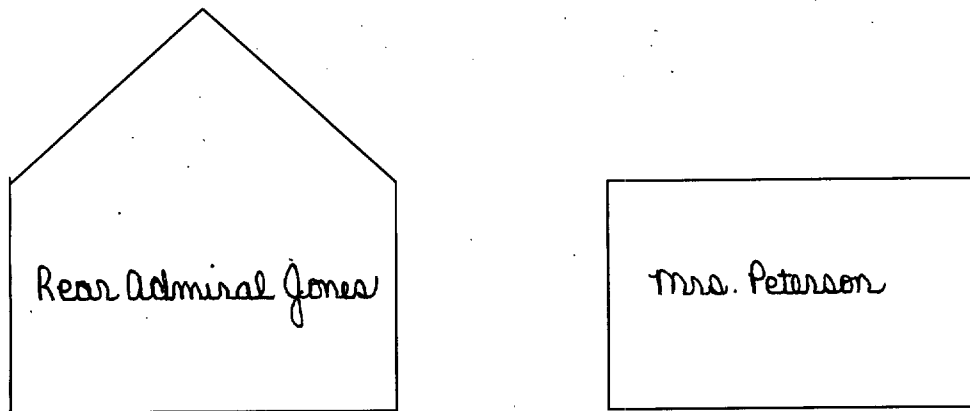
DINNER PARTNERS

At large, formal dinners each man is provided with the name of his dinner partner whom he is to escort to her place at the table. Normally, he takes in the woman who will sit on his right.

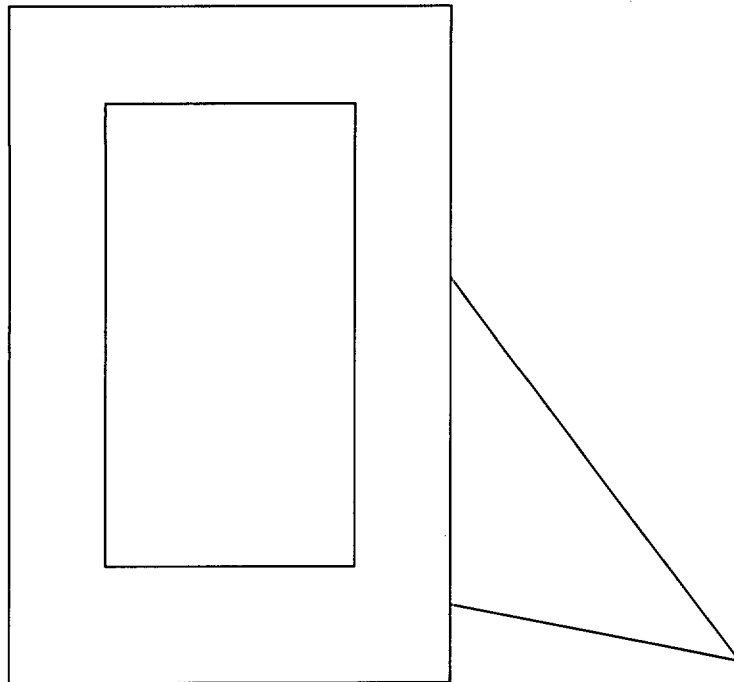
There are several procedures for acquainting men with the names of their dinner partners. The simplest method and that used for a small dinner is to have the hostess announce who is to be seated next to whom.

At a larger affair, each man will find on a silver tray, often placed in the entrance hall, a small envelope bearing his name and reflecting the name of his dinner partner on an enclosed card. Near this tray of name cards there is generally a leather, table-shaped diagram of the location of each guest's seat at the table.

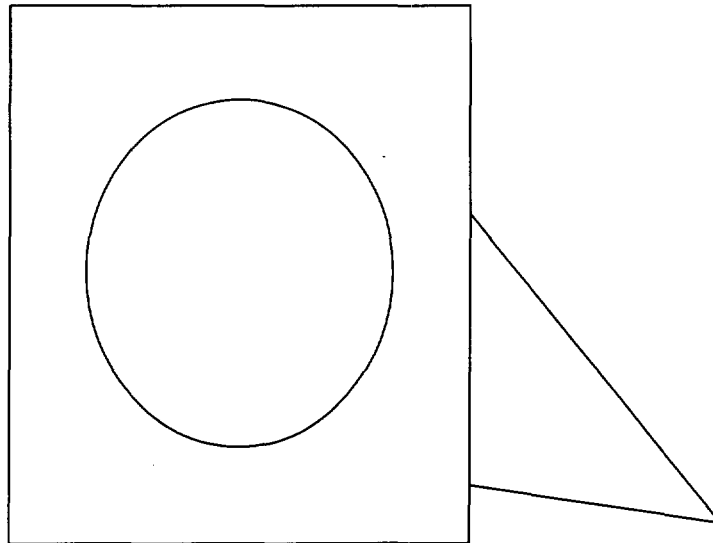
Name Cards



Seating Diagram – Rectangular Table



Seating Diagram – Round Table

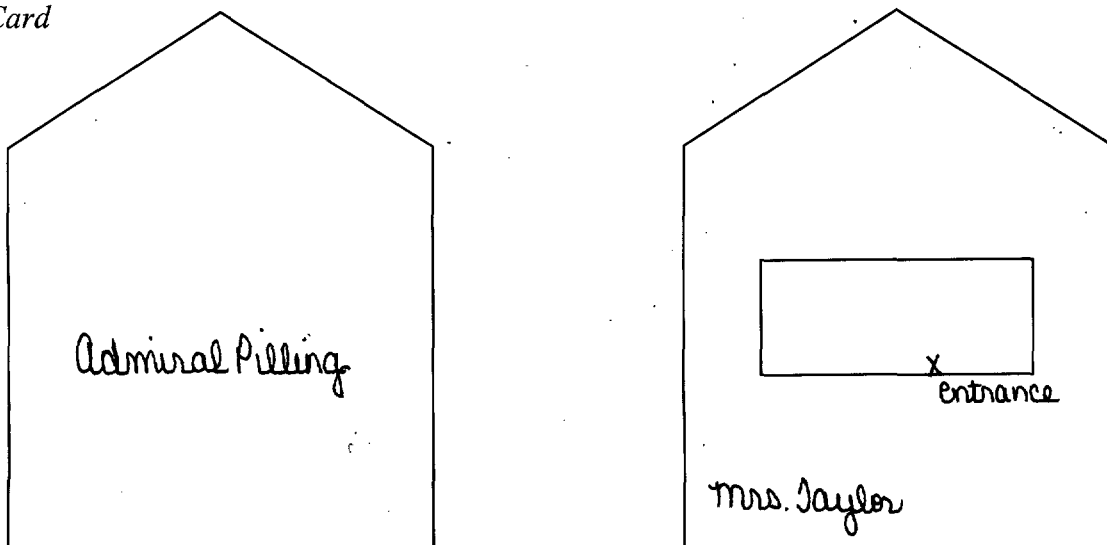


A third alternative observed at large dinners involves the use of a small folded card with the man's name on the outside and his partner's name inside, together with a small diagram showing their positions at the table. These will be found in the entrance hall, or sometimes in the room where cocktails are served.

Each man must ascertain who his dinner partner is in sufficient time to be introduced before taking her in to dinner. It is the function of the host to ensure that each man knows or is presented to his dinner partner. At large official dinners, aides make the necessary introductions.

The host, leading the way into the dining room with the ranking lady, seats her to his right. The other paired guests follow and the hostess enters last with the ranking man. This order also applies when an ambassador is the guest of honor. In the exceptional circumstance of the presence of the President, another chief of state, a member of royalty, or a governor within his own State, the hostess goes in to dinner with the guest of honor first, and host follows immediately with the wife of the ranking official.

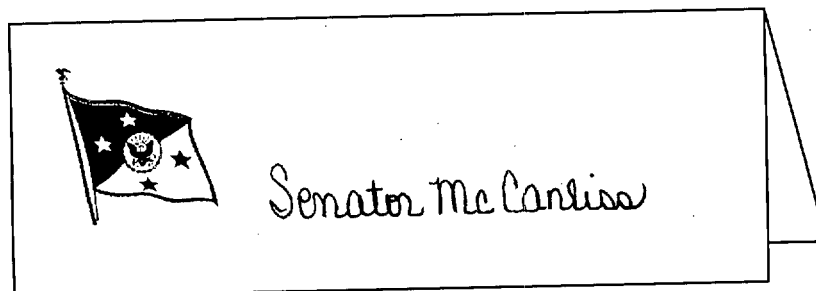
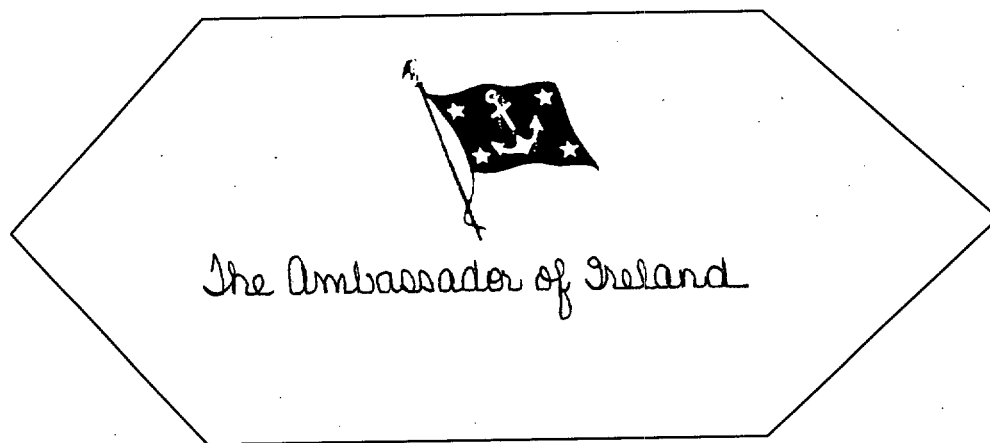
Escort Card



PLACE CARDS

Heavy, white, rectangular cards with gold beveled edges, and sometimes an official seal or flag are often used as place cards, although rectangular fold-over cards and rectangular side-tabbed cards are also popular. A flag officer's personal flag, a commission pennant, the seal of a ship or of an Embassy, or a personal crest may be embossed or stamped in the upper left corner or top center of the card.

The place card is intended to locate the individual at table and to inform dinner companions of his identity. The courtesy title and surname are used (Admiral Brown, Mrs. Brown, Dr. Smith) except for very senior officials for some of whom the position title is proper, and for others their position title and surname. Consult Chapter 12 for guidance regarding senior officials' names on place cards. At a private dinner, it is permissible and more personal to use the courtesy title and surname of senior officials, or their title and surname rather than the title alone. Thus "Admiral Hayward" would be written for the Chief of Naval Operations; and "Ambassador Donlon" for the Ambassador of Ireland.



15 Jun 2001



Mrs. Le Mans



Vice Admiral Seannery

Mrs. Justice Stockerly

MENU CARDS

Menu cards are sometimes used for official luncheons or dinners, dining-ins, formal farewell or welcoming parties for high ranking officials. The standard generally found in a flag officer's mess is a heavy white card about 4 x 6 inches with a gold beveled edge. It is usually decorated with the admiral's flag at the center top and the name of his/her command.

On Navy ships such menus are printed, embossed or handwritten in English. Each line is centered on the card and only one dish is included on a line. Appetizers, rolls, relishes, candy, and coffee do not appear on the formal menu.

In the flag mess, one menu is placed before the host and others between every second or third guest.

Sample Menu Card



CHIEF OF NAVAL OPERATIONS

Luncheon

Beef Consommé

Stuffed Boneless Red Snapper

Vegetable Jardiniere

Avocado and Grapefruit Salad

Chocolate Mousse

*CNO's Dining Room (4E641)
Wednesday, 29 March 2000*

CONVERSATION AT TABLE

“Turning the table” is an outdated practice whereby all guests were obliged to follow simultaneously the lead of the hostess in shifting conversational attention from the guest on the right to the one on the left. Today, a person seated at a reasonably narrow table is expected to talk with immediate dinner companions to the right and left and also with those across the table. The considerate guest is alert to speak with all neighbors at the table, ending any exchange smoothly rather than at a signal from the hostess, and engaging anyone not already involved in a conversation.

SMOKING AT TABLE

With the Navy’s current “smoke free” environment, it is inappropriate to bring one’s cigarettes to the table or smoke during/after the meal.

ORDER OF DEPARTURE

The ranking lady must make the initial move to depart. Generally, she should leave a formal dinner within an hour of its conclusion, and allow perhaps a bit longer at an informal one, if she so desires. After her departure, the other guests may follow without any further regard for precedence.

THANK YOU NOTES

A thoughtful guest will always write a thank you note to the host/hostess who has entertained him. It is also thoughtful to send flowers or a gift for very special occasions.

It is generally not necessary to write a thank you note for large scale official functions, such as a reception to which hundreds have been invited.